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THE MODERN JAPANESE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

ITS RELATIONS TO MISSIONS IN JAPAN; TO THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE ORIENT; TO THE ULTIMATE INTERPRETATION OF CHRISTIANITY

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The subject assigned me confines the discussion within rather narrow limits. The term "modern," as applied to foreign missions, commonly signifies roughly the nineteenth century. For Japan then it includes only the period subsequent to Perry's treaty, 1854. "Japanese Christian Church" I interpret to mean, for the purposes of this paper, not the church in Japan but the Christian church in so far as it has come under Japanese administration—become, so to speak, indigenous, "Japanese." Thus it will be seen that the work of the Jesuits in the sixteenth century and the work of several modern foreign missions which is still under the administration of the European missionary, effective and noble as all that work has been and is, does not here come under review. This paper deals rather only with those communions that have lately become nationalized.

Beginnings

It goes without saying that the Christian church in Japan was the fruit of the labors of the foreign missionary as the first human agency. When the first modern missionaries went to Japan there was no church and barring some believers who remained from the work of Xavier, who for generations handed down their faith from father to son, and who held that faith only in secret, there were no Christians. Not only so, there was not even an ear to hear. The faith and teaching which the missionaries

took was a bitterly hated and strictly prohibited thing. At first then the missionaries sowed the seed, and reaped the first-fruits, preached, taught, baptized and gathered into churches. It could not be otherwise.

Early Growth

The first church was organized at Yokohama, March 10, 1872. It consisted of nine members, was not denominational, and was felicitously named "The Church of Christ in Japan."

From this early time the Japanese Christians were zealous for the conversion of their countrymen. During the next decade to be sure the missionaries took the leading part in Christian work and exercised, directly or indirectly, very large influence in the affairs of the young churches themselves. But the members of the little native Christian community nearly all took upon themselves responsibility for bringing others to the knowledge of the truth. At the beginning of the decade the idea seemed to obtain that to become a Christian was to become an evangelist; and by the latter part of the decade native ministers had been trained in theology and some were ordained. Little missionary societies were organized, some of which have lived and grown till today; and at least one Christian weekly began to be published.

The next two decades (1883–1903) saw many vicissitudes, seed sowing and rapid ingathering—some years the church membership was increased by more than a half or almost doubled—now a season of reaction when Christianity lost favor among the people, and again a period of readjustment when numerical growth was much retarded and theological beliefs were greatly and rapidly modified, when faith was shaken and some strong workers swerved from their pristine faith and left the ministry; some left the church altogether. Later, just before the next period when began the absorbing quest for a healthy independence, the church settled down to a more normal growth. But amidst all the vicissitudes of these two decades there was advance

in numbers, advance in intelligence of the faith, advance in the institutions of organized Christianity, advance in the responsibility borne by the Japanese ministers, advance in the whole life of the church toward a native, Japanese form of Christianity.

Reaching Maturity

From the comparatively early days of the organized churches there were in each of the larger communions strong men, Japanese, who were capable of leading in the organization of the churches themselves and in that of the other institutions of the Christian community. They were effective preachers, some of them preëminent. Others wielded a powerful pen. There were within the churches educators of influence and laymen of national, even of international fame for the institutions which they founded in the spirit of the Master for the salvation of the orphan, the wayward, the ex-convict, and for other unfortunates. There had grown up a body of men in the churches who were in fact what some of them have since come to be called in word "The Leader." Back of them too the rank and file of the church membership were full of an increasingly strong desire for independence.

At the same time the most influential missionaries to Japan, both those who bore commission from American and European missionary boards and the few like Janes at Kumamoto and Clark at Sapporo who were providentially led to Japan just at the psychological moment, and who served her people for very limited periods, were men who appreciated that Christianity is a life and not form and dogma. They were content to see Western *forms* of church life and Western *statements* of Christian truth disregarded, if only the *life* itself and the *truth* itself should take root in the hearts of the people. Mark Hopkins when president of the American Board said, "It is our business to make Christians and not Congregationalists." This was from the first the attitude of the American Board's mission. It was largely the attitude also of the missions

of other communions. The Right Reverend Bishop Andrews, English Bishop of the Episcopal Church in Hokkaido, regards self-support as a most vital question in the Japanese church today, not to save a few pounds of gold to the English church, but to bring to the Japanese church a new life in all its abundance. In the interest of self-support and independence a portion of the missionary work within his diocese and in that of Kyushu too has been made diocesan.

The fundamental purpose then of most of the missions to inculcate the Christian life in such wise that it should manifest itself in forms and expressions native to the country; the increasing number and power of individual Japanese "leaders" fitted by inheritance and training, by real ability, and by personal experience of the Christian life for wise and effective leadership; and the increasing readiness on the part of the laity to assume the responsibilities, financial and other, of a self-supporting, self-propagating Japanese church—all these things conspired to encourage the hope of an early realization of a thoroughly nationalized Christianity.

At this juncture came the Russian War of 1904-5 with its uninterrupted series of signal victories for the Japanese arms. The terms of the Portsmouth treaty of peace were unsatisfactory to a portion of the Japanese public. But the eighteen months of fighting and of successes culminating in the wonderful battles of Moukden by land and of Tsushima in the Japan Sea served as a powerful stimulus to the already rising national self-consciousness. The nation came to a vivid sense of its power and importance and to a no less vivid sense of its responsibility in the Eastern world and in the whole world.

And just as the nation was stimulated by these events so also was the Christian community. The churches came to feel more keenly than ever the need, the compelling importance, of complete independence of any thing that looked like foreign control. Should the spirit of the church of Christ lag behind the spirit of the nation? The Christians must needs have this independence alike for their

own self-respect and for their standing in the eyes of the non-Christian public. To continue to have his affairs controlled by the foreign emissary marked the Japanese Christian in his own eyes and in the eyes of his non-Christian neighbor as falling in point of citizenship and nationalism below his fellow-countrymen. To continue receiving financial aid from foreign mission boards moreover seemed to imply some sort of foreign control in the affairs of the churches aided. Two decades earlier the Christian leaders had been recognized as the leaders in society at large. Now they are losing this leadership and falling to a place of relatively inferior influence and power. Something must be done. Obviously the first thing to be done was to secure full independence of foreign control and in order to this independence of control the churches must rise to independence of financial aid. Men of spiritual insight also saw that only by such independence and self-support could the churches rise to their opportunity and worthily present Christ to their fellow-countrymen, not to mention neighboring peoples. Thus it transpired that since about the time of the Russo-Japanese War all the churches experienced a great impulse toward independence and self-support and three great communions, the Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodists, have already attained to that goal.

The history of this phase of church development is intensely interesting and profoundly important. As we proceed in the study of the times it will become apparent that almost everything really turns upon financial self-support and very little need be said about independence of mission control *per se*. The reason is not far to seek. In the great communions the churches from earliest times had developed a considerably self-governing organization. This is most strikingly illustrated perhaps in churches of the Congregational order of government where the local church alone is the seat of authority and that local church is organized to conduct its own affairs without vote or voice from the outside. But self-government is hardly less a fact in the Presbyterian order, for here also the local church

is first, and is self-governing through its session. Later a group of such local churches form themselves into a Presbytery which is self-governing, ordering certain phases of the life of the local churches of which it is composed but not looking to any higher authority outside itself until a group of Presbyteries organize themselves into Synod or Assembly to be over them an authority within limits. In the Methodist churches also which are Episcopal in order and have a foreign bishop oppointed by the home churches great pains seems to have been taken by the missions in Japan to give large place to the voice of the native brethren in matters of church government.

Let us glance now somewhat in detail at the later steps of development of the three great communions in attaining to full self support and independence.

In the Kumi-ai (Congregational) body as above intimated, owing to the policy of the American Board mission, to the earnestness and ability of the Japanese ministers, and to the intrinsic character of the Congregational polity, there had been from early times local churches self-governing, local associations self-governing and a National Council, meeting annually, self-governing. Still there was a certain indefiniteness in the relations between these several self-governing bodies on the one hand and the American Board mission on the other. There was perhaps a modicum of imfluence emanating from the mission by virtue of the financial aid granted to a few of the local churches and by virtue too of the coöperation by men and money of the mission with the national body and in some instances with a local association or even with a local church in regular evangelism in new fields. There was need of clearly defining relations, of sealing the independence of the Kumi-ai body, and of forming plans by which that body could push evangelization in a way more adequate to the spirit of the times and more adequate to the great opportunity.

Accordingly in 1905 two committees, one of the Kumi-ai churches and one of the American Board mission, were chosen to consult together about ways and means. The joint meetings of these two committees were marked by

frank expression of opinion and great cordiality of feeling. The Japanese committee were eager for some plan by which should be ushered in a new and more effective era in the development of their churches and also a forward movement in the evangelization of their country. It was finally proposed by the missionaries that the Japan Missionary Society, organ of the Kumi-ai churches, take over some thirty of the churches and congregations hitherto aided by the mission and become responsible for their support and development. The Kumi-ai committee, after due deliberation, heroically accepted this heavy responsibility. For this purpose a budget was made up of two items, first 8700 *yen* as a parting gift from the mission to the thirty churches, to be paid during three years, and second the promise of the Japanese body to raise 6000 *yen* during a like period. At the expiration of the three years "eighteen churches had actually assumed self-support, and six had been handed over by the Japan Missionary Society to the local associations within whose borders each was located. Three more attained self-support January 1, 1909, and the ramaining are under some kind of provisional care."[1] Since January 1, 1909, the Kumi-ai body has been fully self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating; it might also be added self-respecting—a veritable pillar and ground of the truth.

For the "Church of Christ in Japan," as the churches of Presbyterial government are called, unfortunately the way to a like independence lacked something of perfect harmony between the Church and the associated missions, To begin with there were four associated missions to be dealt with, Presbyterian North, Presbyterian South, German Reformed and Dutch Reformed; and these four missions differed somewhat among themselves in their opinions as to relations with the native church. A slight difference of theological belief and a question concerning the use in the Meiji Gakŭin Theological School of W. N. Clarke's *An Outline of Christian Theology* had arisen to disturb some-

[1]Christian Movement in Japan, 1909, p. 224.

what a perfect cordiality of feeling. When negotiations for the adjustment of coöperative relations between the church and the missions began moreover there was a tendency on both sides to insist upon rights.

In February, 1906, a committee of the Synod of the "Church of Christ in Japan" (Presbyterian) made the following statement: "It is now more than thirty years since the church was founded. It extends from one end of Japan to the other, and carries on its work through a Synod and Presbyteries. It has a board of missions actively engaged in the work of evangelization and the establishing of churches. Therefore it seems to it reasonable to claim that it has a right to a voice in all work carried on within its organization or closely connected with it. That is the principle for which the Synod stands; and for which it believes that churches in other lands, under like circumstances, would stand.[2]

On the other hand, some of the missions were disposed to urge their rights. Dr. Arthur J. Brown in his discussion at the World's Missionary Conference, 1910, said: "I heard a great deal during my tour in Asia about the rights of the boards and societies in the missions which ought to be preserved. I would rather go to the other extreme and say, '"we have no rights in Asia and Africa except the rights to serve our brother in the name of Christ."'[3] This insisting on rights by both parties, theological differences, etc., proved considerable of a hindrance to the progress of the negotiations and somewhat of a disturber of cordial feeling. But these things could at worst only retard somewhat such an adjustment of relations as should ultimately leave the native church a thoroughly self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating church of Christ. And that consummation has now been successfully reached with two methods of coöperation or affiliation with the four associated missions, according as each mission may elect.

The same kind of movement for independence occurred

[2]World's Missionary Conference, 1910, vol. 2, p. 36.
[3]World's Missionary Conference, 1910, vol. 2, p. 345.

in the Methodist fellowship. In a general conference, May 22–June 2, 1907, was consummated a union which consolidated into one Japan Methodist Church results of the work of missions of the Methodist Episcopal, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Church, Canada. On Sunday, June 2, Rev. Yoitsu Honda was duly consecrated as first bishop of the new united Japan Methodist Church. Bishop Honda is the first Japanese bishop of any church. He is probably the first bishop to be consecrated from any of the Far Eastern peoples.

With regard to the relations of the missionaries to this new church, the Japanese members of the conference made the overture which is embodied in the following resolution:

> *Resolved:* That every missionary regularly appointed by the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, or the Methodist Church, Canada, to work in coöperation with the Methodist Church of Japan, as contemplated in the basis of union adopted by the commissioners of said churches, shall by virtue of such appointment be entitled to all the rights and privileges of actual membership in the annual conference where his service is being rendered, so long as his administration and conduct conform to our discipline.
>
> Every such missionary who may in writing elect to serve in this relation shall be subject to the assignment and direction of the missionary authorities of the church by which he is supported, in consultation with the *Kantoku* (bishop).
>
> In the event of his non-conformity to our discipline, the *Kantoku* shall in writing so advise the missionary authorities of the church to which such missionary is responsible; and the course to be pursued shall then be determined by consultation between the *Kantoku* and said missionary authorities.[4]

These terms were considered quite satisfactory and were cordially accepted by most of the missionaries. Accordingly the missionaries now "are either *Bucho* (presiding elders or chairmen), evangelists at large itinerating over part or the whole of a district, or by the joint action of the appointing power of their respective missions and Bishop Honda, assigned to the oversight of particular fields, or, in some cases, they are left free to develop work

[4]Cary's History of Christianity in Japan, p. 341.

of their own in the cities where they reside or in the surrounding country, alway however making it contributory to the work of the Japan Methodist Church."[5]

The Episcopal and Connexional organization is proving a heavy financial burden but the brethren are struggling with it manfully and in time they are bound to win out.

Through this somewhat detailed survey it will be seen that Christianity in its Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist forms has taken root in Japan. The institution of the church has become native to the soil. It has become nationalized. The other communions are pressing on toward the same state of maturity. For the most part the foreign and native workers alike are eagerly anticipating the day when each can say, "our church has been planted in Japan."

Relation of Native Churches to Missionaries

There was a period of about a decade just before the negotiations for independence above outlined when the relations between the missionaries and their Japanese brethren were from time to time considerably strained. It was a period when the Japanese and foreign workers were coöperating in the work of Christianizing Japan, but the methods of coöperation were less clearly defined. The missions were working along the lines that had been in use for many years. They were sometimes inclined to regard themselves as the principal workers and their Japanese brethren as "helpers," "native agents," or what-not, according to the terminology of the home boards used in statistical tables and in reports where the work among uncivilized tribes and highly civilized peoples was all treated alike. The foreigners were also not infrequently rather over tenacious of "orthodox" statements of Christian truth, despite the fact that it was their general purpose to promulgate a life rather than a form, the truth of salvation rather then any statement of that truth. They

[5]Christian Movement in Japan, 1909, p. 294.

also felt such responsibility toward their home boards in the administration of funds as now and again gave offense. In short, the missionaries had not yet become fully acclimated. They were still working in a sort of religious extra-territorial atmosphere.

At the same time, the real life of the Japanese churches and ministers was rapidly developing. Their leaders were more and more becoming competent leaders. They chafed under the financial restraints. Their Oriental intuition in the interpretation of the Oriental Bible and the Oriental Christ made it impossible for them to express their faith in the terms of Occidental, much less in those of medieval creedal statements; and the mere suggestions of the "native helpers" sort of missionary report, however much they might be explained away, were an offense to the sensitive Japanese spirit. Moreover, our Japanese brethren felt that all this sort of relation of subordination to the foreign propagandists prejudiced them in the eyes of their own nationals and greatly hindered the progress of the Gospel and the growth of their churches.

The actual working out of such relations moreover, in all honesty be it confessed, led to no little mutual irritation and friction. Occasionally, a joint committee of Japanese and foreigners would be divided concerning some question under discussion exactly on race lines. This fact itself tended to rouse feelings other than fraternal. Is it any wonder that both Japanese "leaders" and foreign workers earnestly desired a better way? The wonder is that the missionaries didn't sense the situation and remedy it earlier. But perhaps the time and the native church were not ripe for the change much earlier than it came.

Now that the organic relations between the three great Japanese bodies and the associated missions have been clearly defined the relations of the individual missionary have also become clear and pleasant. There is a new cordiality on the part of the churches, their laity and their ministry alike, toward the foreign missionary. They rejoice in our presence, welcome our aid and seek an increase in our numbers. They welcome us as individuals

into church fellowship and as members of the churches they welcome us to a place in the local and national bodies. In the Methodist body foreigners in some cases serve as presiding elders. The happy solution of the problem of relations in these three bodies, Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist, has blazed the way for a like happy adjustment in all the other communions which will undoubtedly in due time be fully realized.

Increased Aggressiveness

Beginning with the period of endeavor on the part of the Japanese churches for a full independence—for convenience, say the close of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905—there has been a notable increase in activity, a new aggressiveness amongst the churches. Old lines of effort have been retained and vigorously pushed. Individuals of the Christian community have zealously and effectively led in various forms of eleemosynary work, orphanages, prison-gate efforts, schools for the blind, etc. Still eleemosynary work is the point perhaps where today the churches most feel their inadequacy, a point also at which foreign workers are able to render most effective service. They are doing so in the rescue of fallen women, in settlement work, in leper hospitals and in other like endeavor.

There is an increasing volume of Christian literature issuing from the presses, periodical literature and literature in the more full and permanent forms. But most of this is sporadic and disconnected. There is now being put forth an effort to produce more systematically a literature suited to the need of the times. The Japanese because they write in their own tongue are the most effective writers. But missionaries are active in forwarding the plans and in producing certain works for which no competent Japanese author seems as yet to have arisen.

In education also a new impetus seems to have been given. The churches are uniting in an effort to develop a better system of Christian educational institutions culminating in a Christian university. This is for the double

purpose of raising up a better equipped ministry for leadership in churches and a better equipped laity for leadership in public affairs, in all the walks of life. As yet however the things to record in educational effort are plans in the making rather than institutions founded.

As should be expected the most strenuous efforts of the churches have been put forth in direct evangelism. At the beginning of the negotiations for independence and really as a part of the movement for independence the Kumi-ai churches inaugurated a special campaign for evangelism to continue through one whole year. A special budget was raised by prominent laymen to meet the expenses of this campaign. The same sort of thing has been done now for six successive years. The methods of evangelizing have been varied as experience has shown wise and as conditions in the churches and in society have seemed to demand. But the great forward movement has continued with what we hope to be increasing effectiveness, till for the year 1910 the accessions to the churches on confession of faith were about one-tenth of the total membership. And there has been a similar forward movement in evangelization in the Presbyterian and Methodist bodies with similar gratifying results.

This extra and somewhat extraordinary evangelistic work has been carried on chiefly by pastors who have their own churches to care for and who really have more work in their own several parishes than they can do. Prominent laymen and missionaries have helped in the campaigns as they have been able. But the planning of the work and the chief labor of carrying the plans have been done by the Japanese pastors who are already over-worked.

At the same time these three great churches have had a care for their fellow nationals who have emigrated to Hawaii, to America, to Korea, to Manchuria, to China and elsewhere. Especially have they sent missionaries to the Japanese in Korea and Manchuria and organized Japanese churches in those countries.

And, latest and ripest of the fruit of independence, Japanese Christianity has itself entered upon the era of foreign

missions. The Church of Christ of Japan (Presbyterian) has sent a mission to China and made a beginning of work for China's millions. The Kumi-ai body has sent (June 20, 1911) a mission to the Korean people. As Korea has been annexed to Japan this may not be technically speaking a foreign mission. But since the Koreans are a people of alien birth, alien customs and alien language it is to all intents a foreign mission. So that the Japanese church with its coming to maturity has become self-propagating at home and propagating abroad.

It may be well to remark here by way of parenthesis the value of this development for the sake of the evangelization of the whole Far East, for despite the differences between Japanese and Koreans or between Japanese and Chinese they are all Orientals with essentially the same intellectual, ethical and religious background for their several civilizations. All write with the same ideographs, all own Confucius as moral teacher and all have been influenced by the religion of Shaka Muni. Thus it comes that the Oriental can understand the Oriental as we Occidentals can never hope to do. So also the Oriental can evangelize the Oriental as we Occidentals can never hope to do. All hail the day when the Japanese church shall be able adequately to undertake the evangelization of the neighboring Eastern peoples.

Church Union

In common with other mission fields Japan is making her contribution to church union. The allegiance of the Japanese Christian to his own denomination is a constant surprise to the missionaries. It is comparatively rare and seems strangely difficult for a faithful Congregational or Presbyterian or Methodist Christian to transfer his membership to another body even if he reside in a place where there is no church of his own order. And yet the accomplishments already made in the line of church union and church federation are considerable. The Church of Christ of Japan (Presbyterian) is itself a union of churches

that grew up as the result of the work of four large missions. The Japan Methodist Church includes churches that were formerly associated with three home churches. The *Seiko-kwai* (Episcopal) unites in one body the churches that grew out of the labors of the missions of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and the Church Missionary Society (British) and of the American Episcopal Church.

There have been at times negotiations with a view to the organic union of other bodies as of the Kumi-ai and Presbyterian several years ago and more recently of the Kumi-ai, Protestant Methodist and United Brethren. These efforts did not prove successful. But they were by no means in vain for they brought about a better knowledge of one another and a fuller appreciation of the strong points of the organization of each other. There is moreover in the air to-day a definite feeling after something like a federation at least of all the Christian bodies in the country. The great Protestant Foreign Missions have had such a federation for some ten years already by which they consult together and work together. The federation has published nine issues of an annual entitled *The Christian Movement in Japan*, which itself holds a valuable place in the Christian propaganda.

In such a country as Japan missionaries coming face to face as they do with a non-Christian society which yet has a teaching of its own soon learn to put little or no stress on things of lesser importance and to unite in presenting to the people the great and living truths of the Gospel, to disregard the points that separate denominations and to emphasize the truths which all hold in common. The native churches also having no interest in the divisions of the church in the West and not even understanding the reasons for those divisions find themselves nearer together than the emissaries who bring the Gospel to them. Thus the missionaries and the native churches alike are pre-disposed to church union. The first churches organized were all undenominational. The contribution of Japan then to the movement for church union comes naturally from both the foreign and the native workers.

Interpretation of Christianity

The story is told of a Japanese student in a class in exegesis in an American institution, bringing in an interpretation of a particular passage of Scripture that surprised his instructor. The instructor asked the young man from what commentary he got the interpretation. The fact is the young man had seen no commentary. The explanation was the one that appeared most natural to his own Oriental mind. It was intuitive. The incident is such as might well occur in any Occidental class room where there is an Oriental student.

As a matter of fact every great civilization that has received Christianity has made its contribution toward the interpretation of Christian truth. Greek philosophy led to certain valuable theological statements. Roman Imperial examples led to the development of a world-wide church organization. Teutonic experience applied the Christian teaching of faith to the everyday life of the individual. And if according to the expectation of John Robinson "the Lord has more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy Word," simple analogy would lead us to expect that the Far East would have something to add toward the fuller appreciation of the Divine Revelation. Now add to the simple analogy the fact that whereas the Greek, the Roman and the Teuton were all Western and yet have helped us to know our Eastern book, the Japanese has the advantage of his Oriental inheritance of thought and feeling and life and therefore brings to the interpretation of our Oriental religion a peculiar fitness that ought to enable him to see in it ever increasing newness of light and to receive from it ever increasing abundance of life. We of the West may well expect our brethren of the East to become our teachers in not a few Christian things. This they are indeed already doing. And this they themselves aspire more and more to accomplish.